MISTER MONSTER THE LEGENDARY LON

A SPECIAL ARTICLE
BY FORREST J ACKERMAN

HIS WAS THE FACE THAT LAUNCHED A THOUSAND SHRIEKS, HIS THE FORM THAT RAISED HORROR TO ITS HIGHEST PEAKS

LON CHANEY, film historians would try to make us believe, was born in Colorado Springs on April 1, 1886, but we will not be April fooled!

They pretend that, in Los Angeles, on the 26th of August, 1930, his throat aflame with cancer, he was taken by the Grim Reaper to Valhalla; but we know better!

Lon Chaney never died!

So much for the warped imaginations of those who would try to deceive us and say that a god can die! They are the stone hearts, who would deny that the power of Wendy's plea to the fairies could save the life of Peter Pan; and their greatest curse should be to ban them from the privilege of ever again seeing another Lon Chaney picture.

With sword in the keyhole & a garland of wolfbane around the sword, Lon Chaney believes he has the vampire trapped & prepares to break down the door & capture him in LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT (Directed by Tod Browning, 1927).

the hidden truth

It was in the eventide of the Dark Ages that a kindly witch met a great magician in chameleon's skin, and they were married by a gnome-king. Together they sired a *wunder-kind,* a wondrous kind of changeling child the like of which the mundane world had never known before, and they named this strange-ling L'han Shayn-nii, which in the tongue of the Ancient Ones of the Black Forest meant "the one with face of wax and body that twists like the vine."

For hundreds of years L'han practiced his art of pantomime and was known by many names in many places thru the passing centuries while all the while he waited patiently for Motion Pictures to be born and grow strong enough to record the magic of his mimicry. Then (cleverly) he told producers, publicists, newspaper reporters that his parents could neither hear nor speak, for who would attempt to check on his origin with a Mother and Father who were deaf-mutes?

By now he was known no longer by his fey-name of L'han Shayn-nii but by his film name: Lon Chaney.

Soon he would be known in 2000 tongues as "The Man of a Thousand Faces."

one man monster show

THE FALSE FACES was one of Chaney's early make-up jobs, followed the same year (1919) by his rigorous role as Frog, the contorted beggar, "divinely" healed in THE MIRACLE MAN. In 4 roles the following year, he was blind in one (the wicked pirate of Robert Louis Stevenson's adventure classic, TREASURE ISLAND) and legless in another, THE PENALTY, in which he played a crippled criminal whose body ended in knee-stumps.

In 1921 he essayed two Oriental parts, the first that of a Chinaman in Tod Browning's OUTSIDE THE LAW, and another slant-eyed menace in BITS OF LIFE with Anna May Wong. 1922 saw him as a Chinese again in SHADOWS, and the same year he was both unwhole of body and mind in FLESH AND BLOOD, and played a mad scientist and simian beast-man in A BLIND BARGAIN.

If you think this is Humfraid Boogiart in THE TREASURY OF SCARY MADRE you need to get humping on your homework in American Film History.

In 1923 he shook audiences in THE SHOCK, and once again was a crazed savant, this time in the company of John Gilbert in WHILE PARIS SLEEPS.

Then—

QUASIMODO!

THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME! The first of his two most celebrated characterizations, and one of his most painstaking — and painful. Chaney did more than merely make himself up, he empathized himself into the very valence of Quasimodo, threw himself or grew himself or somehow got himself inside the very soul of the pathetic demented bell-ringer of the Parisian cathedral. The mound of malformed rubber that he attached to his back bent his spine under a weight of 70 pounds. On his chest he wore a breastplate and shoulder pads similar to those of football tacklers. A harness fashioned of leather joined the front and back "armor" in such a manner that he

The Man of A Thousand Faces, with his well-equipped Pandora's Box of Make-up, combs one of the many wigs which helped him flip his fans.

could not have stood erect under any circumstances. Over this cumbersome and uncomfortable foundation he wore a rubber suit, tinted flesh color. Tufts of animal hair were affixed to chest and back. Modeling putty molded his face into a misshapen horror, and a set of false teeth worn over his own accentuated his repulsive appearance. An uncombed bird's-nest of a wig topped his disguise, which he donned daily over a period of almost 3 months!

Grueling, ghouling!

Blind in one membrane-covered eye, tonque darting nervously in and out of his ugly mouth like a serpent's fang, he scuttled like a beetle in the dark corridors of the cathedral or crouched with his silent friends, the sculptured gargoyles of the parapets. Crazed but kindly unless tormented, at last he revolted against the crowd who had jeered at his cruel torture, and scalded his enemies with torrents of molten metal cascading from red-hot pots from on high in his eyrie sanctuary.

Charles Laughton later played Quasimodo, and very well; and, still later, Anthony Quinn was an effective Modo named Quasi; but neither interpretation had the stamp of authority of Chaney's.

the phantom strikes

1925 was Lon's top horror year, with THE MONSTER, wherein he played Dr. Ziska, who gained his victims by arranging auto accidents on a dark and lonely stretch of road near his underground laboratory.

. . . top horror year with his *dual* role in Tod Browning's UNHOLY THREE . . .

Some Like It Hot, WEST OF ZANZIBAR. Here Chaney warms up his tonsils to sing "My Old Flame."

Yul Chaney as "White Voodoo," the bald menace of WEST OF ZANZIBAR.

Lon Chaney and Ivan Linow in a dramatic scene from Chaney's first M-G-M talkie "The Unholy Three."

. . . with his characterization as the mind-warped one of THE TOWER OF LIES.

. . . and then—

His crowning achievement as the mad musician imagined by Gaston Leroux, the deranged organist "whose face was so hideous that he was forced to haunt the innermost depths of the Paris Opera." Roberta O'Toole, one critic who admitted "I shrieked right out loud in the theater and buried my head unashamedly on my husband's chest when Mary Philbin slipped the mask off Chaney as he sat playing the organ," described the impact of his portrayal in these indelible terms:

His outraged visage was horror incarnate: bulging, bloodshot eyes fatigued with violet semicircles beneath them; the grotesquely exaggerated mounds of the cheekbones; the hooked-up, flaring, porcine nostrils; the rotted, jagged teeth, like the rim of an enameled tin can top opened with a ragged knife; the scraggly strands of dead gray hair hanging like soggy serpentine from the incredible pyramid of a head. . . .

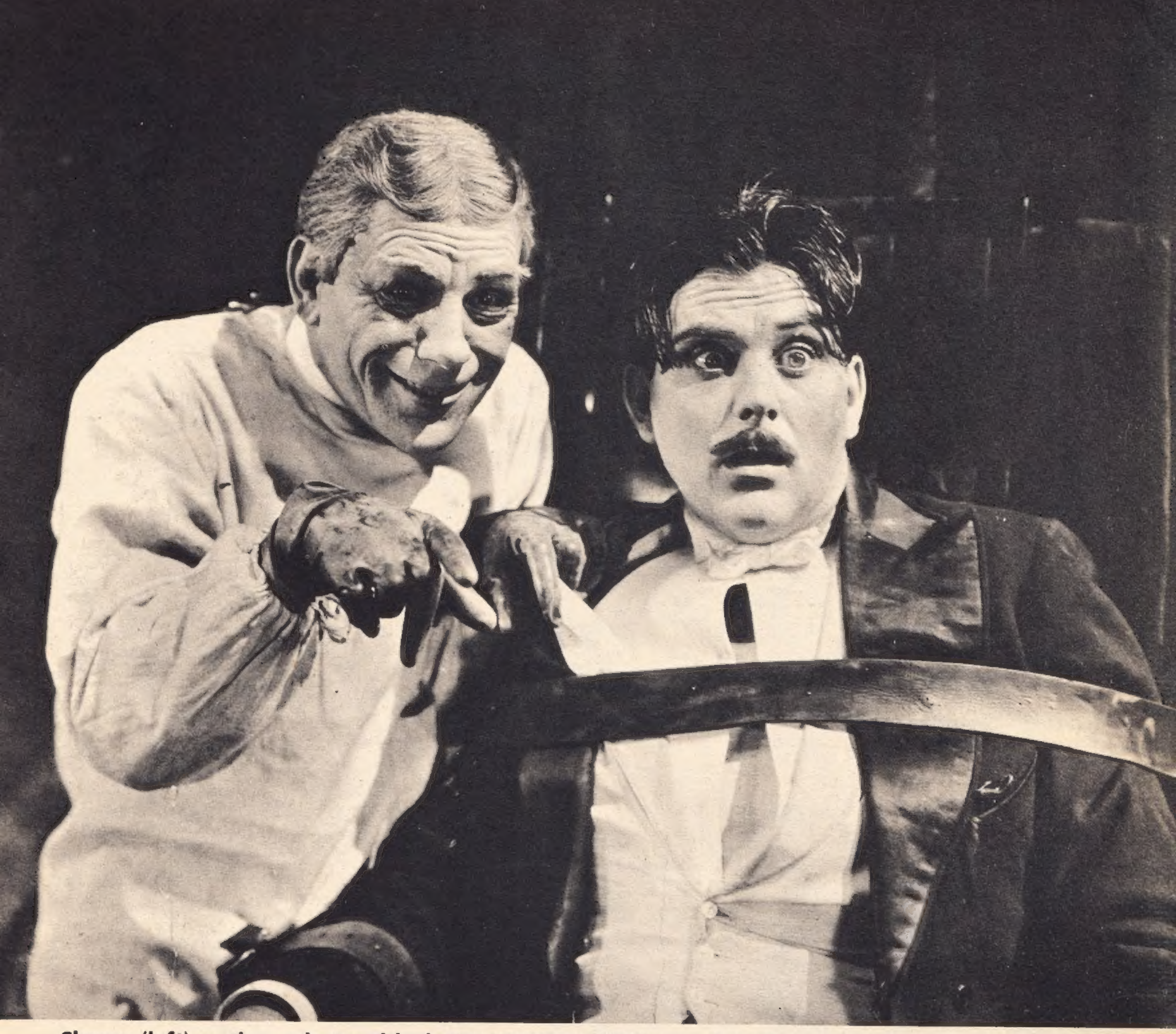
Just recently, horror authority Robert Bloch reported: "When I was an 8-year-old I saw Lon Chaney in THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA—and gazed upon the face of naked fear. Within the past year I attended a revival of the same film. And despite the flickering flaws of this dated melodrama, the scene where Chaney is unmasked exerted the same monstrous magic upon a modern audience."

And the thought may well have crossed the nostalgic mind of Ray Bradbury that if the great artist Gustave Doré had painted the picture of Dorian Gray, and Henry Frankenstein endowed it with life, if would have been Lon Chaney as The Phantom.

watch your step

Today we say, "Is it a bird? Is it a plane? No — it's Superman!" But 35 years ago, when Lon Chaney was at the height of his power, the warning cry was: "Is it a spider? Watch out! Don't step on it—it may be Lon Chaney!" And with good reason, for anything that crept or crawled across the silver screen (or even *flew*, as in the case of the bat-man of LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT) was quite liable to be L.C., the Master of Make Believe.

In 1926 he played a Jekyll-Hyde type role in THE BLACKBIRD and, covering one eye with a coating of egg-white simulated a cataract to play the part of a semi-blind outcast in THE ROAD TO MANDALAY.



Chaney (left) as the madoctor Ziska in THE MONSTER (1925). Too bad the strapping young fellow in his power wasn't Hitler.

In '27 he played *two* Chinese roles in MR. WU; an armless freak in THE UNKNOWN whose feet took the place of his hands, complete to throwing knives with deadly accuracy with his toes; and a human vampire in Tod Browning's LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT, wherein his face was bone-white with eyes popping like olive pits out of hard-boiled eggs and teeth that resembled the ends of ivory spikes.

And the last film he ever made, THE UNHOLY THREE, was a talkie remake of his silent hit which Tod Browning had directed from the book by Tod Robbins. In THE UNHOLY THREE Chaney was a sideshow ventriloquist in the company of "a long, lizard-like figure" called The Human Skeleton; Madame Fatima, "a mountain of purple. painful flesh with small pig-like eyes"; and Tweedledee, a dwarf just a shade over 2 feet tall, whose "little round, shoe-button eyes could flash and his soft, chubby face writhe into a terrible mask, suddenly transforming his expression into that of a murderer." The audiences of 1930 were electrified when the "Man of a Thousand Faces" spoke in four different voices during the same film.

the man beneath the monster

Such was the *reel* Lon Chaney, the star of the scary and the scarry. Had he lived

there seems little doubt that he would have become the monster of FRANKENSTEIN, the menace of THE INVISIBLE MAN, Im-ho-tep the 3000 year old MUMMY, and, instead of Bela Lugosi, would himself have played the role he created in LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT in the sound version of it called MARK OF THE VAMPIRE.

What of the *real* Lon Chaney? A biographer, George Mitchell, tells us:

His movements were quick but graceful, he was high-strung, even nervous, and somewhat grim. His dark eyes, deeply lined face, and cynical mouth, made him seem hard-boiled. He despised weakness, and believed in decency.

He was the second of 4 children. Due to the bedridden state of his ill Mother he was withdrawn from school in the 4th grade to help care for her. In his teens he began his theatrical career as a stagehand and scene painter. He was married when he was 19, and the following year was born his only child: Creighton Tull Chaney, known today as Lon Chaney, Jr. of WOLF MAN, MUMMY, etc. fame.

The first picture on which he got screen credit was POOR JAKE'S DEMISE in 1913. In 1915, besides appearing in 25 pictures, he directed 6 shorts, the last being THE CHIMNEY'S SECRET, which he also wrote as well as acted in.

Once he became world-famous and was besieged for interviews, he became retiring and declared: "Between pictures there is no Lon Chaney."

"Step into my parlor said the spider to the fly." It happened on THE ROAD TO MANDALAY.

Like Father, Like Son. Family Cut-up, Lon Chaney JR.

chaney's secret

Between pictures there is no Lon Chaney —there is the clue, the reason we have not seen a new Lon Chaney film since they say he died 33 years ago. He has been resting, giving his son and actors like Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi and Christopher Lee a chance. What is 33 years between pictures to a man who has lived for hundreds? Undoubtedly he is waiting for just the right part, the greatest monster role of them all, in which to make his comeback appearance.

Comeback?

Lon Chaney has never been away, in the hearts and minds and memories of those who knew his greatness.

Today he should appear to be about 77 years old.

Be kind to the next elderly gentleman you meet—he may be LON CHANEY. ●

James Cagney, lower half, re-enacts famous scene from PHANTOM OF THE OPERA, above, in the story of Lon Chaney's life, MAN OF A THOUSAND FACES.

a complete list of Lon Chaney's film appearances

A

ACE OF HEARTS
ALAS AND ALACK
ALL FOR PEGGY
ALL THE BROTHERS WERE VALIANT
ALMOST AN ACTRESS
ANYTHING ONCE

B

THE BIG CITY
BITS OF LIFE
THE BLACKBIRD
A BLIND BARGAIN*
BLOODHOUNDS OF THE NORTH
BOBBIE OF THE BALLET
BONDAGE
BOUND ON THE WHEEL
BROADWAY LOVE
A BROADWAY SCANDAL
BY THE SUN'S RAYS

C

THE CHIMNEY'S SECRET

D

THE DESERT BREED
DISCORD & HARMONY
A DOLL'S HOUSE
DOLLY'S SCOOP

E

THE EMBEZZLER
THE EMPTY GUN
THE END OF THE FEUD

F

THE FALSE FACES
THE FASCINATION OF THE
FLEUR DE LIS
FAST COMPANY
FATHER AND THE BOYS
FIRES OF REBELLION
THE FLASHLIGHT
FLESH AND BLOOD
THE FORBIDDEN ROOM
FOR THOSE WE LOVE

G

THE GIFT SUPREME
THE GILDED SPIDER
THE GIRL IN THE CHECKERED COAT
THE GIRL OF THE NIGHT
GIRL WHO DARED
THE GRAND PASSION
THE GRASP OF GREED
THE GRIND
THE GRIP OF JEALOUSY

H

HE WHO GETS SLAPPED
HELL MORGAN'S GIRL
HER BOUNTY
HER ESCAPE
HER GRAVE MISTAKE
HER LIFE'S STORY
HOLLYWOOD REVUE OF 1929.
THE HONOR OF THE MOUNTED
THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME

I

AN IDYLL OF THE HILLS

L

THE LAMB, THE WOMAN, THE WOLF
LAUGH CLOWN LAUGH
THE LIE
THE LIGHT IN THE DARK
LIGHTS AND SHADOWS
THE LION, THE LAMB, THE MAN
LON OF THE MOUNTAINS
LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT

M

MAID OF THE MIST
A MAN'S COUNTRY
MARK OF CAIN
THE MENACE OF CARLOTTA
THE MILLIONAIRE PAUPERS
A MINER'S ROMANCE
THE MIRACLE MAN
MOCKERY
THE MONSTER
A MOTHER'S ATONEMENT
MOUNTAIN JUSTICE
MR. WU

N

THE NEXT CORNER
A NIGHT OF THRILLS
NOMADS OF THE NORTH

O

THE OCTAVE OF CLAUDIUS*
THE OLD COBBLER
OLIVER TWIST
THE OUBIETTE
OUTSIDE THE GATE
OUTSIDE THE LAW

P

PAID IN ADVANCE
THE PENALTY
THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA
THE PINE'S REVENGE
THE PIPER'S PRICE
THE PIPES OF PAN
PLACE BEYOND THE WINDS
POOR JAKE'S DEMISE
THE PRICE OF SILENCE

Q

QUINCY ADAMS SAWYER
QUITS

R

THE RANCH ROMANCE
RED MARGARET MOONSHINER
REMEMBER MARY MAGDALEN
THE RESCUE
RICHELIEU
THE RIDDLE GAWNE
THE ROAD TO MANDALAY

S

THE SCARLET LETTER
THE SEA URCHIN
SHADOWS
THE SHOCK
THE SIN OF OLGA BRANDT
STAR OF THE SEA
STEADY COMPANY
STRONGER THAN DEATH

T

TANGLED HEARTS
TELL IT TO THE MARINES
THAT DEVIL BATEESE
THREADS OF FATE
THUNDER
THE TOWER OF LIES
THE TRAGEDY OF WHISPERING CREEK
THE TRAP
TREASURE ISLAND
TRIUMPH
THE TRUST

U

UNDER THE SHADOW
THE UNHOLY THREE (Silent)
THE UNHOLY THREE (Talking)
THE UNKNOWN
THE UNLAWFUL TRADE

V

VENGEANCE OF THE WEST
VICTORY
THE VIOLIN MAKER
VIRTUE ITS OWN REWARD
VOICES OF THE CITY

W

WEST OF ZANZIBAR
THE WICKED DARLING
WHEN BEARCAT WENT DRY
WHERE EAST IS EAST
WHERE THE FOREST ENDS
WHILE THE CITY SLEEPS
WHILE PARIS SLEEPS

* Same Film

That time Chaney took a trip to England, we wondered what he did for entertainment in the wee sma' hours, and now we know what LON DON AFTER MIDNIGHT.